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ETAN/US at UN Decol. Comittee

East Timor Action Network / United States

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Petition to the United Nations Special Committee on the Situation with Regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples

presented by Charles Scheiner

United Nations, New York, July 13, 1994

Mr. Chairman, distinguished members of the committee and guests, my name is Charles Scheiner, and I am coordinator of the East Timor Action Network. I am also the U.N. representative for the International Federation for East Timor, an NGO affiliated with the Department of Public Information.

Today, I am addressing you on behalf of the U.S.-based East Timor Action Network. We appreciate your taking the time to listen to us, and to other NGO's and individuals speaking here today. Over the past year, several organs of the United Nations have shown an increased interest in non-governmental views on the situation in East Timor, especially from the East Timorese people themselves. This is a positive development, and we hope that the perspectives and information gained from such meetings will help the United Nations move the process of decolonization to a successful and rapid conclusion.

The East Timor Action Network was formed a little over two years ago, following the mass murder outside the Santa Cruz cemetery in Dili. But the Indonesian military's killing and its occupation of East Timor have been going on for nearly two decades. We fervently urge you to help push the Indonesian government into serious negotiations -- beyond talks for appearance sake only. The three-stage peace plan advanced by the National Council of Maubere Resistance is an excellent framework to move the discussion process along. It is imperative that East Timorese representatives, as suggested by Bishop Belo and others, be included in the negotiations.

We realize that it will not be easy to move Jakarta. The recent banning of three major newsweeklies in Indonesia, combined with a wave of repression against labor activists and heightened arrests and terror against the East Timorese, demonstrate that the Jakarta government is feeling both international and domestic pressure. Unfortunately, they are responding by killing the messenger, by trying to suppress discussion and hide unpleasant realities. But cosmetics are no cure for cancer.

Last month, I had the privilege of attending the Asia-Pacific Conference on East Timor in Manila. Although Indonesia coerced the Philippine government into excluding several East Timorese leaders and world-renowned advocates for peace and human rights, more than 50 foreigners met with over 200 Filipinos for five days, discussing how to achieve self-determination and other human rights for the people of East Timor.

We had a very productive conference despite the clumsy efforts of the ex-Generals in Jakarta and Manila to prevent it. And what would have been just another calm discussion of East Timor, such as we are having in this room today, became a world-class news event because the blatant actions of the two governments so violated the norms of accepted civic behaviour. The casual observer could not but ask "What are they trying to hide?"

Mr. Chairman, this Special Committee knows what they are trying to hide. You, as well as other United Nations bodies, have heard 19 years of testimony and petitions from East Timorese people and others attesting to the gross inhumanity of the genocide and occupation. Special rapporteurs and envoys of the Secretary-General have gone to East Timor and reported on their findings; one was just there this week. Although today's hearing will add some more information to your inventory, we hope that it will do more than that.

Action is the middle name of the East Timor Action Network, and we urge the United Nations to take some. For only the U.N. has universally recognized standards to measure political and human rights, standards

which the Indonesian government has legally agreed to uphold. It is time to enforce those standards: East Timor should not have to start a third decade under Indonesian military rule.

During the past year, the East Timor Action Network has grown to more than 1,500 members, with about 15 local groups around the United States. Using a variety of means and media, we have tried to inform as many North Americans as possible, both about East Timor and about the disgraceful role played by the United States in arming and supporting the Indonesian occupation since 1975.

As Americans learn about the horrible situation in East Timor, they become enraged and energized, and we help them channel their outrage into constructive work to change United States government policy.

It would be overly optimistic to say that U.S. policy has turned around; rather, it is in flux. Some in the Administration and in Congress defend the status quo and are reluctant to say anything that Indonesia might find uncomfortable. They are afraid of affecting American companies' profits from trade, mining and weapons sales in Indonesia.

But an increasing number feel differently -- they know that the violations of human rights and continued denial of self-determination for the people of East Timor are so blatant that it is inhuman to continue with "business as usual." I would like to cite several events since the Committee's 1993 session which illustrate that point.

* Since 1992, the Congress has prohibited all U.S. military aid to Indonesia, which involved Indonesia soldiers coming to the United States for training. Although the State Department has tried to circumvent the ban by continuing the training with Indonesia paying for it, the House of Representatives passed legislation last May which closes this loophole. The matter is still before the Senate.

* Last July, the State Department refused to allow the resale of four U.S.- made F-5E fighter planes from Jordan to Indonesia. They were responding to public and congressional pressure about East Timor. When President Clinton met with President Suharto in July in Tokyo, the two discussed East Timor and human rights in Indonesia itself.

* Over 150 members of the House of Representatives and the Senate have signed letters to President Clinton urging him to take action to support human rights and self-determination in East Timor.

* Last fall, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee unanimously approved Senator Feingold's amendment which would link arms sales to Indonesia to human rights concerns in East Timor. Although the bill which included this amendment never reached the full Senate, it marks the first time that Congress has tied arms sales to human rights violations in a specific country.

* After an extensive interagency review of U.S. policy toward Indonesia, the Clinton Administration now denies licenses for exports of light arms to Indonesia. Washington feels that these are the weapons which have been used recently to kill people in East Timor.

* Two weeks ago, the Senate Appropriations Committee approved legislation to prohibit the use in East Timor of all lethal weapons purchased by the Indonesian government from the U.S. government in the future. Although the measure was defeated on the Senate floor, it represents a marked increase in the willingness of Congress to openly confront Indonesia, and will be followed up by further activity this week or next.

* Other legislation approved by Committees and still in the Congressional process would challenge U.S. support for multilateral loans and non-humanitarian aid for countries with excessive military involvement in their economies or which falsely report their military spending. Indonesia has been the principal illustration of these problems.

The Indonesian government places a high priority on getting the U.S. government to overlook its repressive practices. Last April, the Asia Society hosted a conference on the U.S.-Indonesia relationship, underwritten by major mining and banking interests, and featuring Foreign Minister Ali Alatas, 30 other visitors from Indonesia and the entire U.S.-based Indonesian diplomatic corps. This event began an ongoing campaign to revamp the American people's perceptions of Indonesia.

Nearly all conference participants believe that the problems are image, not substance. Few of the assembled corporate and political leaders seem able to comprehend that it is wrong to kill people and deprive them of their basic political and human rights, even if it doesn't hurt the bottom line.

I'd like to close by quoting a political leader with long involvement in the East Timor issue. Daniel Patrick Moynihan, now a Senator from New York, was the United States Ambassador to the United Nations in 1975 and 1976. In his book, "A Dangerous Place," he boasted that after Indonesia invaded East Timor:

> "The United States wished things to turn out as they did, and worked to bring this about. The Department of State desired that the United Nations prove utterly ineffective in whatever measures it undertook. This task was given to me, and I carried it forward with no inconsiderable success."

Senator Moynihan has since had a change of heart. Last March, he wrote constituents:

> "I share your concern for this longstanding violation of the Charter of the United Nations and for the human rights abuses which Indonesian troops continue to commit. Even Indonesia concedes that the people of East Timor have the right to "self-determination" and yet it refuses to permit them to exercise that right. And the killings continue, as when Indonesian troops slaughtered participants in a peaceful march at the Santa Cruz cemetery near Dili in 1991.
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> "I have repeatedly urged the Department of State to take a stronger stand on human rights in Indonesia and East Timor and I support the termination of all non-humanitarian aid to Indonesia. ...The time has long since come for the United States to take a tougher approach with the Indonesian government."

I hope that my government listens the words of former Ambassador Moynihan, and that others who have been involved since 1975, especially in Indonesia, can follow his example.

The "Situation in East Timor," as we so glibly call two decades of invasion, occupation, genocide, murder, rape, torture and terror, will only be resolved when politicians and diplomats step back from their hardened positions and consider inalienable human rights and international law as something more than an problem to be explained away.

Ambassador Moynihan has done that. We hope that Minister Alatas and President Suharto can do so as well. This Committee and the entire United Nations bears major responsibility to advance the process of changing Jakarta's position, so that the East Timorese people can finally decide their own destiny in peace.

Thank you.